

The harmonics of holism

By Steven Rose

GREGORY BATESON:
Mind and Nature
A necessary unity
256pp. Fontana Paperback, £1.95.
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There are two conflicting tendencies in biological thought. One arose with Descartes and the birth of modern science; it is analytical, mechanical and reductionist. For this tendency, the task of biological explanation is to dismember the organism into its component parts: organs, cells, molecules; and then to account for the workings of the whole in terms of these discrete units. At its most extreme, philosophical reductionism collapses all higher order discourses into "nothing but" rather messily imprecise special cases of the lower ones. For Descartes, the components were the cogs and pipes of clockwork and hydraulic models. For the nineteenth-century physiological materialists, they were chemical: "Man is what he eats, genius a matter of phosphorus and the brain secretes thought like the kidney urine". Then came the new twentieth-century Mendelians, like Gregory Bateson's father William, the founder of modern genetics, and mechanist developmentalists like Jacques Loeb, for whom all activity reduced to the sum of simple mechanical ironisms. For today's Christians, the ultimately reduced particle is the DNA molecule, that selfish gene for which the organism is merely DNA's way of making more of the same DNA.

The second tendency is synthetic and its roots long predate Descartes, stretching back into the earlier, more holistic harmony of humanity's relationship with nature which was the hallmark of pre-scientific biology. This tradition stresses the integrity of the organism, and the roles of evolution and development that its very structure imposes upon it. Its nineteenth-century exponents were comparative anatomists like Cuvier and Geoffroy St. Hilaire, or, later, the developmental biologist Hirsch (inventor of "cuneiform", the "life force" beloved of Shaw).

The steady ascendancy of reductionist thinking diminished the power of this alternative, organicist approach, until this found refuge in Joseph Needham's theoretical biology club in Cambridge in the 1930s. In the neutral systems theory of Von Bertalanffy and, later, C. I. Waddington. Today, it survives in developmental and structural biology and in the opposition to vulgar sociobiology; a precious source of alternative ideas about the living world in a society whose biology has suffered from the historical accident (?) that physics developed first as a science, and from the seventeenth century on, became the model towards which all else must aspire. Some, of course, would claim that this was no accident, but the inevitable product of the conjunction of the birth of modern science with that of modern capitalism.

Gregory Bateson was—despite, or because of, having been reared in the Mendelian tradition of his father—firmly in the holistic camp. *Mind and Nature* is his last book; a summary, epigrammatic and sometimes self-indulgent ramble through the terrain traversed by a career which spanned biology, anthropology, the war and the post-war period, a long period with Margaret Mead to the 1930s, and anti-psychiatry. It is precisely the sort of attempt to raise the "larger" biological questions with which holism is concerned and which so irritates its reductionist critics. "A grand but empty synthesis" writes the psychologist Stuart Sutherland in *Nature*; "promiscuous, muddled and rooted in fallacious metaphor," claims another. Nick Humphrey, thus echoing the battle cries of a much older debate.

So what is Bateson arguing? First, he betrays a holistic rather than reductionist analysis, he is concerned to stress relationships rather than objects; patterns, symmetries, interactions between components. No object, no phenomenon, exists or has meaning in isolation; both existence and content are given by its interactions, by its past history and present context. For reductionists, the object is ontologically

prior to its relationships: "a noun is the name of a person, place or thing". For the holist it is the system which has ontological priority: "A noun is a word having a certain relationship to a predicate". The apprehension of relationships is part of our sense of aesthetics, and for Bateson even more explicitly than other systems theorists, our loss of the sense of aesthetic unity was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake. The first part of his book, then, is an attempt to reconstitute a biology of relationships on which he later tries to build a re-definition of mind and an insistence on the relationships between mental and evolutionary processes.

Having asserted the primacy of relationships, Bateson moves us at a brisk rate through some of the central themes of contemporary philosophy of science, with an unacknowledged debt to Popper and Feyerabend on problems of proof and objectivity; and an assertion of the separation of the world of knowledge from that of the objects of knowledge—the map is not the territory, epistemology is unconscious, the division of the universe into regions to study is part of the knowledge structure—not necessarily part of the universe itself; scientific causation is different from mathematical causation, the first expressing temporal, the second logical, relationships.

The points made are wise and, to me, generally unexceptionable. That they are thrown out by Bateson without being rooted in the philosophical and epistemological debate that has raged around them over the past decade may be seen either as the irritating intellectual sloppiness of an autodidact or as the amateurism of a profound mind summarizing a lifetime of experience. An example of the principle of complementarity? From this base comes the central, and for me least satisfactory, part of the book, a reflection on the nature of mind. Bateson lists a series of characteristics of mind, by which, he says, his book must stand or fall. A pity, as it happens, reductionist thinking has been surprisingly unable to come to grips with mind, leading

as it has to the oddities of Skinnerian behaviourism or Eysenckian psychometry. The rival, more holistic systematics of the Marxist (Luria) or the structuralist traditions (Piaget) have been much richer. Yet Bateson's eclecticisms does not, astonishingly, permit him any reference to either of these traditions. Piaget, whose atomism is a genetic epistemology so closely parallel to Bateson's, does not even figure in the index.

Perhaps this is why Bateson's list of the characteristics of mind is so empty. "A mind is an aggregate of interacting parts or components... Mental process requires circular... chains of determination... But these are surely the characteristics of all complex systems, and in the real world, as Bateson himself reminds us, all systems are complex. So, everything is mental, and we are back in one of the old philosophical solutions to the "mind-body problem", double aspect theory. In his attempt to preserve the primacy of relations over objects in the "world of ideas" (another unacknowledged debt to Popper?) Bateson dissolves any specific meaning of mind at all.

It is thus on very shaky ground that he wishes to build his final synthesis, that between the processes of mind and of evolution. Genetic change and the processes involved in learning are analogous, he argues. Again this is a frequently drawn analogy, and not merely by holistic and systems theorists like Piaget. Archetypal sociobiologists, like Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (1976), argued that the spread of ideas in society was subject to evolutionary and selection pressures similar to those affecting the spread of genes in a population.

During the 1980s there was a period in which it was fashionable to argue that because both genetic transmission and memory involved the preservation and transmission of information, the molecular processes that underlay them would turn out to be the same: if nucleic acids (DNA) were the genetic material, it would be the same as the information stored in the brain, by permutations in the structure of

paradigms. The reasons why one or another paradigm is accepted at any given time are not particularly internal to the paradigm itself. The transition from one paradigm to another is a social process, a change in the way of seeing the world, for instance, that is not determined by the paradigm itself.

Provided one takes his malady as a metaphor and moves on, Bateson still has some worthwhile things to say. Appropriately enough, given his own family tradition, he demolishes the Lamarckian heresy of the "inheritance of acquired characteristics"—that a personal but of the geneticists—before proceeding to develop some of the ideas on ontogenetics and structure which were first aired in the 1950s by Waddington. This view of evolutionary change, now being extensively and excitingly explored as part of the second wave of opposition to vulgar sociobiology (the first was merely concerned with refuting its more obvious errors and challenging its ideology), emphasizes that selection works only on pre-existing structures, structures whose geometry long predates their present-day adaptiveness.

Why do land-living vertebrates have four legs? A Darwinian adaptationist would say because this form is the best solution to the problems of locomotion, and arises by selection acting on random mutations. The structuralist answer is because land-living animals are the successors to four-finned fishes, and stayed with a basic form which was already part of their developmental programme. Developmental processes are conservative, and selection can only act on what is already there. This is why an old Lamarckist saw clowns that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. The processes whereby structural changes imposed by experience during an organism's development become incorporated into its heredity—which Waddington termed genetic assimilation and the experiments in support of which Bateson lovingly details—transcend both Darwinian and Lamarckian models of evolution.

According to a now widely held view, science is an essentially neutral theory and experiment are interpreted within local, overriding paradigms. The reasons why one or another paradigm is accepted at any given time are not particularly internal to the paradigm itself. The transition from one paradigm to another is a social process, a change in the way of seeing the world, for instance, that is not determined by the paradigm itself.

The gene of grammar

By P. H. Matthews

NOAM CHOMSKY:
Rules and Representations
299pp. Oxford: Blackwell, £7.50.
0 631 32641 4

It is a long time since Noam Chomsky wrote books of the sort that ordinary scholars are forced to publish. *Essays on Form and Interpretation* (1977) revived a group of largely technical articles. *Reflections on Language* (1975) mingled philosophical polemic with impressive glimpses of the theory of grammar towards which these articles were groping. A series of conversations with Milton Rosen (English version, 1979) goes over matters already discussed in sundry places. His most important publication of the early 1970s was another collection of reprints (*Studies on Semantics in Generative Grammar*, 1974).

This new work is scarcely more substantial. Of six essays two are reprints, the others mostly to be found in the first four. As Chomsky's coolly remarks, he has left these "to virtually their original form instead of eliminating some redundancy". The first three reprints express his general views on language, which yet more reprints in yet more critics. These are diffuse and longer than their arguments warrant. The fourth offers a sketch of present grammatical hypotheses. This is shorter than it should be, and is neither truly popular nor fully explicit. It is a tribute to Chomsky's eminence that such casual publications deserve to be studied carefully.

His philosophy of language has changed little since *Reflections on Language*, which John Searle reviewed at length in the TLS (September 10, 1976). A speaker is supposed to have tacit knowledge of a grammar of his language; Chomsky stresses that the option

"knowing a grammar" is primary, and "knowing a language" only secondary. The acquisition of this grammar is compared to that of a physical organ, just as the growth of a human ear or a bird's wing is not determined by factors external to the organism, so the development of the faculty of language is not sufficiently explained by the external stimuli (utterances heard, and so on) which a child is presented with. It is, it is said, genetically regulated, indeed we ought to talk of the "growth" instead of the "learning" of grammar; the usual term is itself a misconception.

But although these are philosophical issues, and it is mainly philosophers whose objections Chomsky is seeking to rebut, he seems reluctant to argue on purely philosophical ground. Many have attacked his notion of tacit knowledge: can one talk of rules of grammar that speakers "know" but of which they are not and cannot be made conscious? He begins by treating this as if it was a terminological problem. Very well, he suggests, if "knowing grammar" is not like other things that are called knowledge, let us simply invent a new word and talk of "cognizing grammar" instead. But the crucial question is whether the concept of "cognizing" makes sense. Chomsky's reply is ultimately that of a practical scientist. His aim is to investigate the structure of what he calls the faculty of language, just as other scientists investigate, for example, the structure of the sun. If his approach gives results: principles of great explanatory power, have already been discovered. What alternative has any critic to offer?

I am not a philosopher and must leave it to those who are to say if this defence satisfies them. But, as a grammarian, I cannot easily see the discovery that Chomsky says so profound. He appears, for instance, to a principle of "locality", but although this is mentioned four times in general discussion, he fails to tell us what it is. It implies that it is what has hitherto been called the "sub-

jectivity condition", which is redundant in the technical papers. But the change of term presumably reflects some change in formulation. Indeed it is not clear what Chomsky's claims are. Many readers will not have heard of subjectivity either, and are thus expected to take him wholly on trust.

The principle which Chomsky does formulate is that of "sparsity"; but this tries to cover things which are not evidently in reduction. Indeed it is an infinitive with an unspecified subject. For example, in *It* is unclear what to do, Chomsky assigns an empty subject of *to do* which, by this principle, can have indeterminate reference. Another case is an unspecified element that is understood with reference to an antecedent. For example, in *Mary brought a dog to play with her* the empty object or complement of *with*, standing in the usual position of a relative pronoun *to dog which she could play with*, which is allowed by it to be said the same principle to be anaphoric to a definite. The suggestion, therefore, is that empty phrases with indefinite reference are possible under the same conditions as empty or "other" anaphors.

But that is plainly false. If it were true we ought to be able to say, for instance, *Mary came to play with*, where the subject and object of *to play with* are both indeterminate. So this would mean: "Mary came for unspecified *x* to play with unspecified *y*." If I follow Chomsky's understanding of anaphora, it should also be conceivable with an anaphoric subject and an indeterminate object. Thus "Mary came for her (Mary) to play with unspecified *y*." Indeed I have a suspicion that it should also be interpretable as "Mary came for her (Mary) to play with unspecified *x*." For example, we might propose a "specified COMP" principle: "COMP" being the position of relative pronouns in Chomsky's notation—which would say that

indeterminate reference is impossible at that point. It is general in "other sentences" (we might say) for laws to have counter-instances. But are explained by another general principle it is the same thing as a *finite* which would simply take away with it a distinct part of the other hand is offering. On the face of it, the rule for opacity is in fact too independent. One object of "COMP" and one for the subject of an infinitive. Neither is anaphoric, nor is a child's "grammar" the manner of a child's "grammar" as the whole.

I do not mean to suggest that all of Chomsky's findings are valid. Many are illuminating, for the grammar of English is for many years. But his favourite condition, as presented so obscurely, is in this as in a more recent article the spring, that he is in danger of building himself into a dead end. It is not time he published a clear and systematic account, so that they can be judged properly.

The collected papers of R. W. Hunt in *The History of Grammar in the Middle Ages* have been edited with a preface by G. L. Bursell. An introduction by John Hall (214pp. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, BV, Fl 55. 50 2720895 4). The first three studies in this collection deal with the change in grammatical doctrine that took place in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, with its abandonment of its earlier *ars grammatica* study and its adoption of logic. The fourth paper helps to answer the question of how grammar, especially theoretical grammar, was taught in the medieval university.

Doubtless there could be some fiddles which would be out. For example, we might propose a "specified COMP" principle: "COMP" being the position of relative pronouns in Chomsky's notation—which would say that

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commentary

Who's afraid of fantasy?

By Rosemary Dinwiddie

The Waterfall
BBC TV

BBC's four-part adaptation of Margaret Drabble's *The Waterfall* is a great success, particularly in its casting and playing. Peter Duffell, who dramatised and directed, has got the balance of the scenes right both between the man and woman, Jane and James, and the two women, Jane and Lucy (they are cousins). Jane loves Lucy's husband, James. As the centre of the trio, Lisa Harrow as Jane Grey is on screen much of the time; she has the kind of beauty that stands up to patient exploration by the camera and holds the story together. It also contrasts perfectly with Caroline Mortimer's Lucy: both high-cheekboned, both wide-mouthed, the two might well be cousins, but—as in the novel—Lucy is tougher, wearier. Their moods, guilts, affection, complicity are entirely credible. And so is the high romance of Jane's sudden love affair with James: the change from lust to love is handled with subtlety and grace, and the two women's reactions are convincing.

Yet wasn't the book quite different? When I had returned from reading it shortly after it came out in 1969 was an image of cold, an improbable but impressive fantasy of a woman giving birth alone in a white desolation, not a story of "problems" and "adjustment" as it is described in a *Radio Times* interview with author and cast. The novel, but not the television version, does indeed open with such a scene: Jane falls outside while dozing and Jane has her baby, hunted by a remembered story of a woman stunted in the Arctic and giving birth alone.

But Peter Duffell could not have reproduced it quite that way. Drabble uses two distinct voices in the novel, and he had to find a voice somewhere between the two. One is the voice of a poet and fantasist,

violently literary and romantic, unabashedly laden with sin, guilt, and remorse. The other is the voice that has become the more typical Drabble note over the years—sturdy and sane, the voice of survival. "It is all so different from what I had expected. It is all so much more cheerful" is its tone; the words—much included in the play—are Jane's at the end of the book, where there is a great brightening of skies and clearing away of snowstorms. The first, romantic voice is much the better.

That opening—the snow, the overheated room, dim light, sleeping baby, Jane's claustrophobia, falling in love with his cousin's wife as he nurses her—is drenched in fantasy and all the more powerful for it. It has fairylike blood and snow, a little incest, delivery—deliverance, a hero who "looks dangerous" but is gentle. It is a womb-rump, a shared birth. It is also a fantasy of capture, and of rescue through sexuality (Jane has been "frigid"). "You're my prisoner," James says. "And in the end, then, will you rescue me?" she asks. He does. "Falling, coming towards him, meeting him in last down there in his arms, half dead but not dead, crying out in him, trembling, shuddering, quaking, drunk and drowned, down there at last in the water."

This is how Jane Grey's author might have written about sex if she had lived in the 1960s. The romantic side of the book is saturated in nineteenth-century fiction. The women's names suggest Jane Eyre, Agnes Grey, Lucy Snowe, and the novel's structure is a Regency book (he is a paragon of a Regency man like Shelley). The newborn is Bianca, for the snow. The snow has an association with the erring woman turned out of doors with her child, for Jane's account of herself is loaded with terms like stone-moment and repentance. She is also Lady Jane Grey, executed for a brief moment of queenly; James's near-fatal car accident is the price they almost have to pay for adultery.

She is partly based, says Margaret Drabble in the interview, on Sylvia Plath, and there is certainly a hint of the hermetic atmosphere of *The Bell Jar*; Jane (who does write serious poetry) is so fragile that she once fainted when she read the instructions on a Tampax box. But there is also the other voice that Drabble gives her, the one that starts out again after the opening section with "It won't, of course, do; as an account, I mean, of what took place in the play these comments from an other ego are given by a very together. As Gray direct in camera, Jane, the book makes clear, discovers a certain arrogance and talent for succeeding."

Guilt, capture and swimmers have gone out very first since 1969; a tough sisterliness has come in, and the play stresses the comradeship between the two women, relatively unimportant in the novel. It is clear from the *Radio Times* interview that in fact everyone is bothered about the book's being a love story: Jane seems quite mad to her now, Drabble is quoted as saying, and she is really more into ecology these days; crazy, immature, says Caroline Mortimer severely. Jane has "social and sexual problems". So, no doubt, did Maggie Tulliver and Catherine Earnshaw and Jane Eyre, and what a pity there was not a sensible social worker to sort them out.

In fact the novel—which is rather good—is definitely not about sex; it is about the relationship between the two women, relatively unimportant in the novel. It is clear from the *Radio Times* interview that in fact everyone is bothered about the book's being a love story: Jane seems quite mad to her now, Drabble is quoted as saying, and she is really more into ecology these days; crazy, immature, says Caroline Mortimer severely. Jane has "social and sexual problems". So, no doubt, did Maggie Tulliver and Catherine Earnshaw and Jane Eyre, and what a pity there was not a sensible social worker to sort them out.



A detail from José Clemente Orozco's fresco "The Revolution of 1911" (1921), from the catalogue of the exhibition devoted to his work at the Museum of Modern Art, Penthouse St, Oxford, until January 4. The catalogue (128pp, including top of colour plates) is available for £1.95 at the exhibition or £3.95 (plus £1 postage) by post from the Museum.

Volume and pressure

By Chris May

Babylonian
Date 2 Cinema, Russell Square

Thematically, in terms of structure and character development, *Babylonian*, as its director, Franco Rossetti, admits, is no masterpiece. It is essentially a pulp movie. But, because of its successful exploitation of postmodernism in white British audiences, its importance transcends ordinary critical values. Rasta, for all its philosophical inconsistencies and anachronisms such as the depiction of Hailo Selassie and unrelenting humankind demands for representation to Africa, remains the dominant political and cultural force for black British youth. In *Babylonian*, the film's "Babylon" stands for the pervading evils of Western civilization—from the police to pick eating to the pressure of Western civilization itself.

Babylonian is about pressure. The hero, Blue (convincingly played by the reggae musician Brixley Ford), suffers the difficulties common to young urban blacks: unemployment, racist attacks on the streets, police harassment which results in parental disapproval and eventually forces him to leave home. Together with his friend Reedy (portrayed by Trevor Laird, who deftly balances humor and pathos), he finds voice in uttering a "sound system" (a rap-like, highly amplified reggae discourse). The film plot, a vehicle for a picture of life in the street in London, culminates in a police raid on a party at which a rival sound system operator competes in a contest, the winner of which is decided as much by the volume of the music as by its quality.

More of a documentary than a work of fiction, apart from its tendency to cram an impenetrable amount of action into a short time span, *Babylonian* is a thoroughly convincing account of one aspect of black British youth culture. Divisions between reality and fantasy blur into insignificance.

Such a working method was deliberately chosen by Rossetti, whose previous work includes *House on the Hill*, the story of a black boy, which was

haunted by ATV, and *Black and Blue*, the Linton Kwesi Johnson documentary, both of the BBC during the last General Election. Rossetti says "my first job in cinema, but I also believe in filming things the way they are. *Babylonian* is fiction, a story, but it is a story that could happen, and the situations are entirely real."

Two notable poetry readings take place tonight and next Friday at the Keats House, Keats Court, London NW3: November 21, Ted Ruzwicz and his translator, John Ruzwicz; November 22, John Ruzwicz and his translator, John Ruzwicz. (A rare public appearance) and Arthur Koestler. Admission is £1.50 at the door.

T.L.S. Children's books

Signposts to judgment

By Margaret Meek

NANCY CHAMBERS (Editor):

The Signal Approach to Children's Books
Kestrel, £12.50.
0 7226 5641 G

If any doubts remain about the nature, scope, quality and significance of children's literature, they must surely be dispelled by the contents of *The Signal Approach to Children's Books*. In this remarkable feast of the magazine, authors, critics, commentators, collectors, poets, translators and illustrators are brought together, with Nancy Chambers's meticulous editorial care, to illustrate the pattern and movement of children's literature over a decade. The reader, even who reads all of the essays when they first appeared, can recall neglected perceptions, examine established criteria and move forward to new evaluations.

The *Signal* approach is clearly eclectic, but distinctive. From its earliest days the magazine gave writers the space they needed to examine ideas, texts or critical theory so that the cursory glances of reviewing could be replaced by sustained argument. Elinor Moss became a regular contributor at the same time as she began the annual survey that was published in *Children's Books of the Year*. Now her own decade of work completed, she writes a summary of the decades that brings into focus the educational, social, economic and publishing backgrounds against which children's books were written, sold and reviewed. She examines the picture book, the teenage novel, ("an awkward phenomenon in easily accommodated") the pre-adolescent, the children's novel, the children's book and the significance of community publishing.

Mrs Moss's commentary is matched by selections from John Drabble's reports on the American scene. (*Signal* has had strong transatlantic links and some affinity with *The Horn*.) Both are concerned with problems of censorship, judging, racism and sexism in what is offered to children to read. It is clear that the 1970s raised those issues; they are an urgent legacy for the 1980s in both Britain and the United States. Mercifully, we benefit from a common language that lets us share Maurice Sendak, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Isaac Bashevis Singer, all of whom are represented here, as is that masterly contributor to children's rights, The Shrieking of Trehorn.

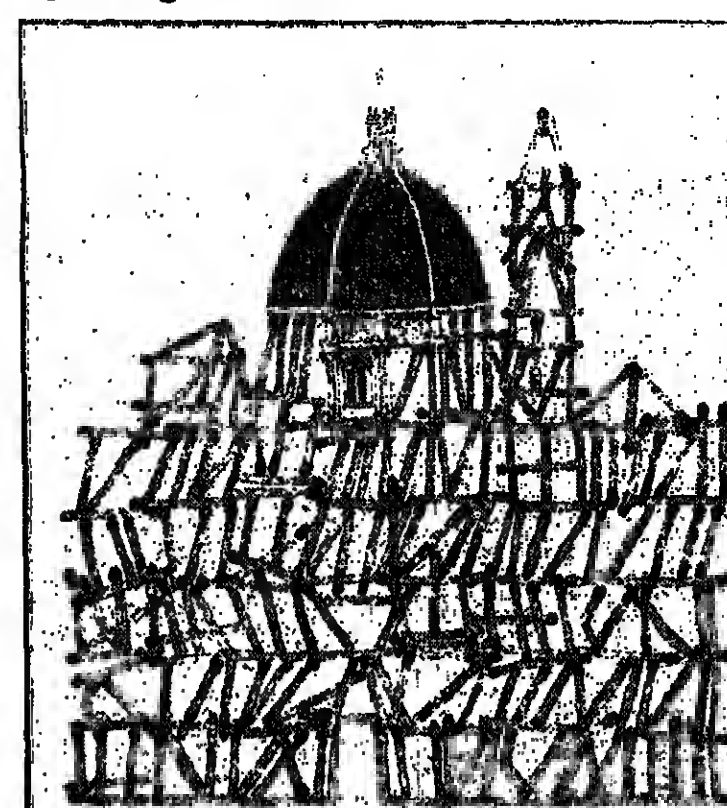
Tribute is paid to more traditional

approaches: the historical studies of the fairy tale (Frederic Whitely) and the Victorian novel (Janice Salway). The essays which in the first year of *Signal*, illustrated the popularity of Perrault and Ithra Sreim are now part of a more widespread interest in early children's books to which both of these authors have made important contributions. What *Signal* initiates is often extended elsewhere. Another example of a conventional approach is the study of an individual author, represented by Charles Sorland's analysis of William Mayne's four books about the cathedral choir school. Sorland looks into the intricacies of Mayne's prose and his technique for making the reader stand back from immediate empathy with a character or from being carried on the tide of the narrative. Even if he does not resolve his own puzzle of whether Mayne's readers should be experienced before they read him or become experienced by reading him, it is a subtle analysis, a good illustration of what a sympathetic critic can do in an essay that he could not encompass in a review.

It is interesting to see these expositions alongside the current appeal of Asterix. The popularity of Goscinny and Uderzo in English-speaking countries is undoubtedly the result of the translators' skill. Asterix's account of wandering in Gaul is a masterpiece of the *de force*. The crafted subtlety of the French daemons more than substitution of the jokes and puns; it needs a matching set of cultural references and allusions. In this specially commissioned article we see how it is done.

Where the book scores is in the presentation of opposing points of view. Toxics which cause dissonance among critics are rarely negligible, and critical divergence allows us to examine the values that inform literary judgments. I would therefore direct the reader first towards two essays on poetry and then to a network of criticism that links the book as a whole.

The publication of *Crow* prompted John Adams in 1971 to examine the poetry of Ted Hughes in the light of his influence on the teaching of poetry. In school, Adams contrasts Hughes's emphasis on the vitality of verse with his "blackest view of life to the point of chaos". Brian Morse, drawing on George Steiner, challenges Adams and asserts that the goodness of a work of art lies in its specifically literary merit rather than its presumed effects. In 1979 Adams wrote a postscript, to which he revised some earlier judgments and considered Hughes's most recent work. What seemed at the time to be self-indulgent critical jockeying



A house for pigs in sticks or a church with fragile foundations? "Santo Piammiforo del Fiore, or The Three Little Pigs" from *The Unique World of Milsomosa Anno*, published by Bodley Head (£5.95, 0 370 303644 4) simultaneously with *Anno's Medley World*, reviewed on page 1327, suggests that more than the house of sticks in the folk tale will fall to the puff of the wolf.

is seen, here, to be at the heart of responses to children's literature. I don't mean the idea that poems can be taught to young readers, but that serious, if differing, individual approaches to a complex work are more likely to do justice to the work's complexity than a single formal judgment. I am sorry therefore that the editor has excluded Alan Tucker's poetry surveys, in this context they would have meshed in with these good studies to clear the way for a broader understanding of what is "poetry for children". Indeed he is represented by a piece on learning to read which, sound as it is, avoids the real problem of what it is to be literate nowadays.

The heart of the matter, and the book, is the representation of critical approaches. In lectures published in 1974, John Rowe Townsend claimed that "the essence of children's books takes place in an atmosphere of unparalleled intellectual confusion". He controls this chaos by asserting that what is a consensus of adults assigns to the children's shelves is

children's literature, provided it contains "the revelation of the past, the revelation of the human nature, good or ill". In January 1975 Robert Lesson challenged the notion of intellectual and cultural consensus, affirming that definitions of fiction, reality and fantasy are socially learned. Attacking the idea of the critic as a pragmatic purist, and the idea of the writer who writes for himself ("a monster, the quintessence of bourgeois egoism") Lesson exposed what writers and critics were actually concealing from each other: the change in children's literature from "a minor interest to something like a mass movement, involving not just writer, editor, critic but large numbers of illiterate teachers and the public". It was a challenge to *Signal* to move with the times.

In a cow place, Peter Hunt returns to the problem of "what 'good' and 'less good' are supposed to mean" in relation to children's books. He distinguishes quality, judgment within a kind or class, from value, a judgment between classes, and achieved

response from potential response to a given book. In this essay the criticism of books for children becomes more significantly part of the continuum of criticism in general. The way had already been opened up by Aidan Chambers's explanation of the ideas of Iser and Wayne Booth in "The Reader in the Book" which appeared in 1977. It is a thoughtful piece, which attempts to use the concept of the implied reader, the child, to examine the author's meanings. More effective, perhaps, in its examination of individual works than in the exposition of a sustained theoretical position (his notion of the "unyielding child reader", for instance, is unsupported by evidence), this essay is clearly at the heart of current *Signal* approaches.

This is demonstrated in the long single piece, a transcription of Aidan Chambers's interview with Alan Garner, which appeared in an abridged version in 1978. This is offered on "one instance of a *Signal* way of talking about children's books". I am glad to have every word of it, not because of any specific approach or insight it contains, but as an example of the nature of judgments and criticisms, and the cluster of ideas that can be made clear when authors and readers explore each other's points of view. Casting about for a fourth, modifying and rejecting each other's examples and intuitions, writer and critic employ many ways of arriving at conclusions. They generalize by means of anecdote and recollection as well as by comparative analysis. Those criteria are flexible; they range widely in their quest for the elusive "what it is" that turns language into symbol. They examine their responses, their voices, their personal myths as literary acts in themselves. Garner's stance is holistic: "If a child can read with a totality of experience and the adult can too, that is a good children's book, and the focus is on the creative act, not the critic's categories. It is an extra-ordinary spiral, and many readers unused to assembling gutcollations from the vagaries of transcribed utterance will find it more challenging than the traditional autonomous text. The point is that this book as a whole provides the context for this discussion. I do not know where else we could have had access to these soundings and discoveries."

Signal has always provided many signposts. Some have led to new postures for its readers, and some to dead-ends. That it has survived the exigencies of the 1970s is greatly to the editor's credit; that it is aware of only here and there at the emerging issues of the 1980s, is a hopeful sign for us all.

Lordly lookalikes

By Nick Roddick

Kagemusha
Gaiety Cinema, No. 1111, Gate 3
Cinema, Coudon Town.

There is nothing particularly original about a comparison between *Kagemusha* and the American *Warrior*. Most critics have made it some point or other. But that at the age of sixty-nine Ford should have produced *Kagemusha* amidst all at seventy Kurosawa gives us *Kagemusha*: a coincidence worth considering. The director made of both films is that of elegy—not merely for a lost period of history but for a lost period of history. As decisively lost for Ford eighty years after the event as for Kurosawa four hundred years on, but for a lifetime's style.

True, there is a strong, perhaps dominant, streak of conservatism in Ford's idealized, reshaping of the American West, whereas Kurosawa has never portrayed Japanese feudalism as anything other than a period of random violence in which individual choices were made. But in practice the two views come close another. John Wayne's Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* is no less excluded from the settler community in whose name he has carried out his obsessive quest than is Takeda Shingen's Kōbei in the former. And when the two directors imperiously share in a dialogue to create, more through visual and narrative structures than through straightforward storylines, an epic cinema whose subject matter is the process of history itself.

Kagemusha has all the signs of being Kurosawa's farewell to the samurai film. It is a genre, moreover, which he has not touched for nearly twenty years. Set at the end of the sixteenth century during the period of complex upheaval which preceded

the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate, it is despite the importance of its opening scenes, the relatively simple story of a thief who, because of his close resemblance to the head of the Takeda clan, is trained as the lord's double. When the lord is killed by a stray bullet, it is this noble's nephew, the other twin, who is taken to the castle and raised as the lord's son. The "shadow warrior" stands in for him. The submergence of his identity is something he appears in view with relative equanimity; snatching marriage (like his predecessor Shingen), he is the first place. But a little overconfidence with a difficult horse leads to his being revealed as an impostor. Kicked out of the castle, he witnesses the destruction of the Takeda clan by the Tokugawa. In a final act of self-destruction (which is also an assumption of his false identity), he immolates himself on the battlefield and singera away to die in the waters of the lake in which his noble's double has been ceremonially buried.

Kagemusha is a controlled, masterly work. At the same time, it is absolutely nothing new. The film, indeed nothing that Kurosawa himself has not tried in earlier

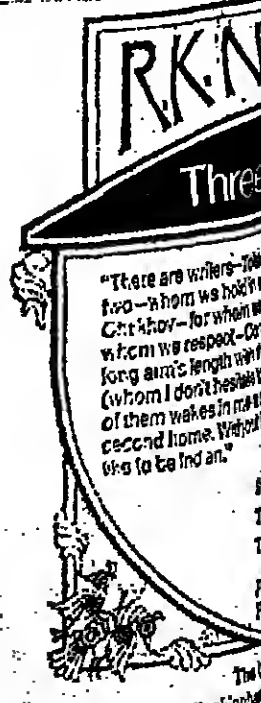
movies. In visual terms, his use of elegiac images, the noble's double, is a device perfected in *Samurai*. Many moments of humor punctuate the narrative as they did in Kurosawa's earlier samurai pictures. The unreal, stylized, colorful effects are strongly reminiscent of *Dodecadon*, his first colour film. The peeling—long periods of inactivity punctuated by sudden flurries of movement—reflects his adaptation in elements of the traditional rhythms (like his predecessor Shingen), he is the first place. But a little overconfidence with a difficult horse leads to his being revealed as an impostor. Kicked out of the castle, he witnesses the destruction of the Takeda clan by the Tokugawa. In a final act of self-destruction (which is also an assumption of his false identity), he immolates himself on the battlefield and singera away to die in the waters of the lake in which his noble's double has been ceremonially buried.

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From 'The Wave Hennets'

You could run along railings with a stick—they'd clatter like ratchets; or of athletes come sound. On your bike you let off a fusillade. Just with a folded paper in your hand. What a lot of noise from walls—you heard it resound, hummer itself back from the train, lamps would make sudden thumps, wooden fences roar, hedges hiss, open streets yawn of your passing; and the pole, took a hump right along the wire with a hiss, sporking like fireworks, but the wire didn't bow along too. At the end, the hump disappeared. Does a body go humming like this through waves?

Edmond Leo Wright



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CHATTO & WINDUS

Right is might

By Dominic Hibberd

P. J. KAVANAGH

Rebel for Good

Hodley Head, £4.50.

0 370 10326 1

The Quest must be one of the most tried and dependable of story forms. It ensures continuity, a central character and a climactic discovery, yet it also allows for digressions, changing scenery and new experiences. The discovery can be unexpected yet turn out to be not what was expected, and the quester's journey may in the end be as much into himself as into some heart of darkness in the 'world outside'. In *Rebel for Good*, the quester is a young man in search of his father, one of his fellow-travellers obligingly suggests that he may also be in search of himself. The journey takes him from Gloucestershire to the American Mid-West, with a digression for a Mediterranean sea-

battle which seems to be his rite of passage. He passes his test, saving the victims of war, and is eventually proved a true knight when his father, since he decides to return to his wife and mother, although her husband appears to have abandoned her permanently. An agreeable young man—and we shall surely meet him again for the pleasantly inconclusive end to the story promises a sequel.

This is surely the middle volume in a trilogy. The first novel was *Scar Jack*, and in *Rebel for Good* the same father and son appear. It is the father, not the son, who is the rebel (both "for good" and "for good"). The recent convention might expect the roles to be reversed, but the new generation may well find itself in sympathy with the sublimated son of a breakaway father. This *Telenovela* can see both sides of a question. His father has the idealistic zeal of the 1960s but is rather more competent than most of the rebels of that strange decade. He belongs, in fact, to the early nineteenth century, when it was not impossible for a white man to lead a Red Indian tribe in a noble hunt

for effort in secure peace between them and the invading settlers. Jack does it, anyhow, and his son finds him saving his braves; but even so young Francis completes his clear vision of himself and all humankind, his father is blind, and though, and we may expect to encounter him, still rebellious in the third volume.

There are some nice period details and descriptions, including an imperceptibly Revolutionary Frenchman who collects butterflies and specimens and declares that he is a noble Savage. Francis travels across the States with him in the year of Trafalgar, and the moral is there for those who wish to take it. Life in the early Republic is vividly evoked. The "new" is mentioned, and Francis learns that man needs a right relationship with Nature even though, civilized men, as well as savages, are capable of nobility. As a surgeon, he looks when others kill and is an life's side. Let us hope that the beautiful Sarah, will not have to wait too long before her young knight is returned to her.

Watery perils

By Sarah Hayes

LINDSAY BROWN

The Secret of the Silver Lockets

Hale, £1.50.

0 7091 8256 0

ERIC WILSON

The Lost Treasure of Casa Lama

Hodley Head, £3.95.

0 370 30142 3

JOAN TATE

Turn Apple, Whittlington

Pelham Books, £3.95.

0 7207 1285 8

The formula for mystery stories has not varied in half a century. It goes as follows: a small number of children of both sexes full without adult help a large group of assorted gnomes after adventures involving rumour, houses, caves, rocks, water, jewels, jewels, cur clues, enemies and mild threats. The closer these wild-things thrillers come to their finalised mould, the more successful they are: their popularity must thus be due in part to their predictability. The vocabulary is easy, the story has no subplots or subplots of any sort, the characters never step into the third dimension. Yet there is more than just convention at work. At the point at which children begin to draw weapons with eagerness and become, they also begin to write adventure stories to formulas laid down by famous lives and secret savans. A dread of individuality and the consequent comfort in the pointed from conforming must surely be at the root of the continued success of a genre whose hallmark is well-worn.

Fourteen-year-old Lindsay Brown is excellent at oedipal order, presumably because she is a genuine consumer. *The Secret of the Silver Lockets* is her second thriller, and with occasional lapses into wordy description, it faces efficiently through the usual network of alarms and coincidences. Miss Brown is not afraid to call her villains names such as

Dudgenn and Cokor or The Tigris (who is "fashionably dressed in burgundy cords with a marbling gold-buttoned waistcoat and a white blouse"). She bravely allows her child-heroes to escape down a tree which falls neatly into the bedroom in which they are incarcerated and, again, to survive certain disaster when they fall fifty feet into a fjord. Clashes abound, but enthusiasm and a healthy luck of self-consciousness keep the adventure afloat.

The Lost Treasure of Casa Lama, fourth in a series of Canada-based mystery stories, founders. Again it features bright boy and girl, lost jewels and watery terrors (Nigara Falls), but it makes the mistake of offering its readers actual clues—Simple, the suspicious butler, puns the jewel hunt and the blacksmith is a punning, and it has the tendency to be not quite straightforward in its drama-

ment—the arch-villainess directs operations from her wheelchair. "Light-headed" in the book describes it, this may be, but heavy-handed is how it reads.

Joan Tate, a good writer writing on this occasion her second-best mystery, but, departs considerably from the formula. Her villain is not burglar, Bill, but city fish swimmers, aiming to cut out her pocket; her girl heroine is an American accompanying her father on a house-fide genealogical holiday; the boy is the Shetlandshire fire-brilliant's son. Adults are seen here, as people, though slightly out of focus, and their presence is actually and refreshingly necessary at all points in telling the bad boys. Within its limits, this is a well constructed, humorous, fresh, interesting thriller. But its predictability, reader's like to be in the Hightmanes who are likely to read it.

Strange but true

By Mary Furness

WILLARD PRICE

Arctic Adventure

Cape, £4.95.

0 224 01819 1

Arctic Adventure is Willard Price's futuristic "adventure" book and his first child weather tale. It is based on two brothers, Hal and Roger Price (twelve and fifteen years old respectively) whose father, a supplier of animals to zoos, has sent them to Greenland and Alaska to capture a range of exotic fauna.

Every chapter describes the hazards involved in capturing a particular animal, in battling weather, in hostile weather conditions, and in the process an enormous number of facts, usually of the little-known or strange-but-true variety, are interspersed. Every child of a did you know that...? sort of mind will find the wherewithal here to outwit his friends and enemies with questions such as "What is a willowaw?"

Prophets of the Pier

Well, once we told people's fortunes, but now
We sit in our robes and fish from the pier,
We fish from the pier; though they call to us
That the sea receded many a year
And, on our little camp stands we sit
And fling out our hooks at low green land where
Children walk by with their dogs through the grass,
And the slight summer breeze makes waves in it.

Well, we are wise and we are ready, when
The dykes they have built to hold back the brute
Sea, shatters in the distance, for a full
Running day there will then come to us
Consisting of grass; and upon and blood,
The children and dogs will be crying out
And with our lines and hooks and prayers, we will
Fish from the pier in the horrible flood.

Alan Brownjohn

Utopia for the young

By Edward Blishen

LIONEL DAVIDSON

Under Plum Lake

Cape, £4.50.

0 224 01873 6

Under Plum Lake is an elegiac story about the monstrous imperfection of human life, and some young readers are likely to remember it for ever. Some will be drawn by the dust jacket to expect a quite different book. This jacket is charmingly crumpled with little writhing and guttering figures in a fairytale landscape—ice-croon mountain and barley-ogur buildings. The charm is curiously wrong thought one does see the problem faced by the illustrator, Mike Wilks, whose black and white illustrations in the text itself seem wholly fitting.

It all happens to Barry, eleven years old, in Cornwall. A cliff and a cave appear. He is a lad of playmate from a world that exists thirty miles under the sea, and was colonised millions of years ago by the earth's crust when trying to shift the planet into a different star

system. As we who live on the surface for on the tops of mountains, as Dido points out) are to dogs, so the people of Egon are to us.

Their advanced technology (to use a perfectly inadequate term) is suggested as, in general, a matter of dissolving. Now you're here, now you're there. As a small detail, you can have a carolover without taking life. "He said you didn't have to kill the cow to get at the steak. You could make the steak the same way the cow did." Life is fun: not on some hedonistic principle, but because "it's opposed to be". That's the logic of it. To all worrying on our mountain tops, as we surface people do, is to make some fundamental error about the very nature of life.

Barry should never have been taken down to Egon. His memory of it will have to be erased. Then it's discovered that a storm has blown up on the Cornish surface: he'll have to stay for days. The business of erasure must go much deeper than expected. And—partly because Dido has come to love Barry—it doesn't work: and Barry is left living mournfully, with impossible memories, in a world that seems childish and ignorant. I feel I've stepped back a thousand years.

It's Utopia for the young, in fact: modernized, and expressed in clear, plain prose. Greatly readable, and kept in movement as a story by the wry sadness that blows, as it were, backwards from its ending. It's a problem, it is in the description of the "fun" which is taken to be not so much the business as the essence of life. Some children will cheer (or, looking back on their reading as adults, may cheer) at the notion that humans might become infinitely serious and understanding without also becoming infinitely incapable of joy—especially physical joy. There's nothing here of your Shavian view that, if we are to have large minds, the rest of us must wither. There are immense satisfactions in, as it were, super-cinemas; and also in a very ungraded sort of hang-gliding. There's also much pure pleasure for pure pleasure's sake. "There was an air of such excitement and gaiety everywhere that I found myself laughing out loud."

Here and there one senses a tendency to suggest that life is Egon is a sort of polymathic candyfloss. Thus, one sees, Mr Wilks's problem with the dust jacket. But that's to look a pretty rare gift horse in the mouth. There are not many books intended for the young that have such readability combined with such thoughtfulness.

Timeless and cautionary

By Catharine Rawlinson

RUTH AINSWORTH

The Pirate Ship and Other Stories

Illustrated by Shirley Hughes

Hoddenhead, £4.95.

0 344 92589 6

MICHAEL MACQUEEN

Curious Tales

Illustrated by Adolf Borg

Translated by Marie Dunn

Oxford University Press, £3.95.

0 19 57142 9

The Pirate Ship and Other Stories is a collection which ranges from very short stories for very small children to longer, quite substantial stories for older children—in fact it is a book a child could grow up with, a book to dip into, and return to again. The early stories have a quality of timeless security, in a gentle world where adventures give gentle straw for their nests. Many of Ruth Ainsworth's stories have been broadcast on "Listen with Mother" and have the nursery wholeness which one associates with that programme. Her subjects range from the virtues of the little tooth, ground up, has powerful medicinal properties. Q: In what ways is the Carpathian useful? A: The Eskimos make blankets, clothes and shoes from his hide. He makes good soup. They cut open the musk—they think it's as lovely as cake. And who knows about the mouse's one which is unbelongingly described as "Like a hot nose on earth. It is a hot nose and very tender. The animal uses it as if it were a hand. The mouse puts it into the mouth. It is the mouse's pride and joy and he reserves any interference with it or about it to a town called Churchill to two to one and are allowed to wander about quite freely.

A new Jerusalem

By Elizabeth Moberly

PETER DICKINSON

City of Gold

Illustrated by Michael Foreman

Gollancz, £5.95, 0 575 02883 1

The retelling of Bible stories demands a certain flair if respect for the original narrative is not to be reduced to mere repellibility. Peter Dickinson has met this need by a creative reconstruction of the oral tradition of the preceding centuries, a more definitive shaping of the Old Testament text. *City of Gold* comprises thirty-three stories, told as they might once have been told, in an imaginative variety of human situations. Narrators include an Edomite hunter, an Egyptian fisherman, parents speaking to their children and grandchildren, and professional story-tellers. The overall narrative is sensitive to the stories of Genesis to the fall of Jerusalem, but the location of the story-telling is not fixed between widely differing periods. The twelfth plague of Egypt is envisaged as being recounted during the persecution of Antiochian Epiphanius in 368 AD.

This context is less directly relevant, but again enhances the impact of the tale of David and Goliath as placed in the mouth of a pagan.

Orcadia

By Charles Causley

GEORGE MACKAY BROWN

Six Lives of Fankle the Cat

Chatto and Windus, £4.95.

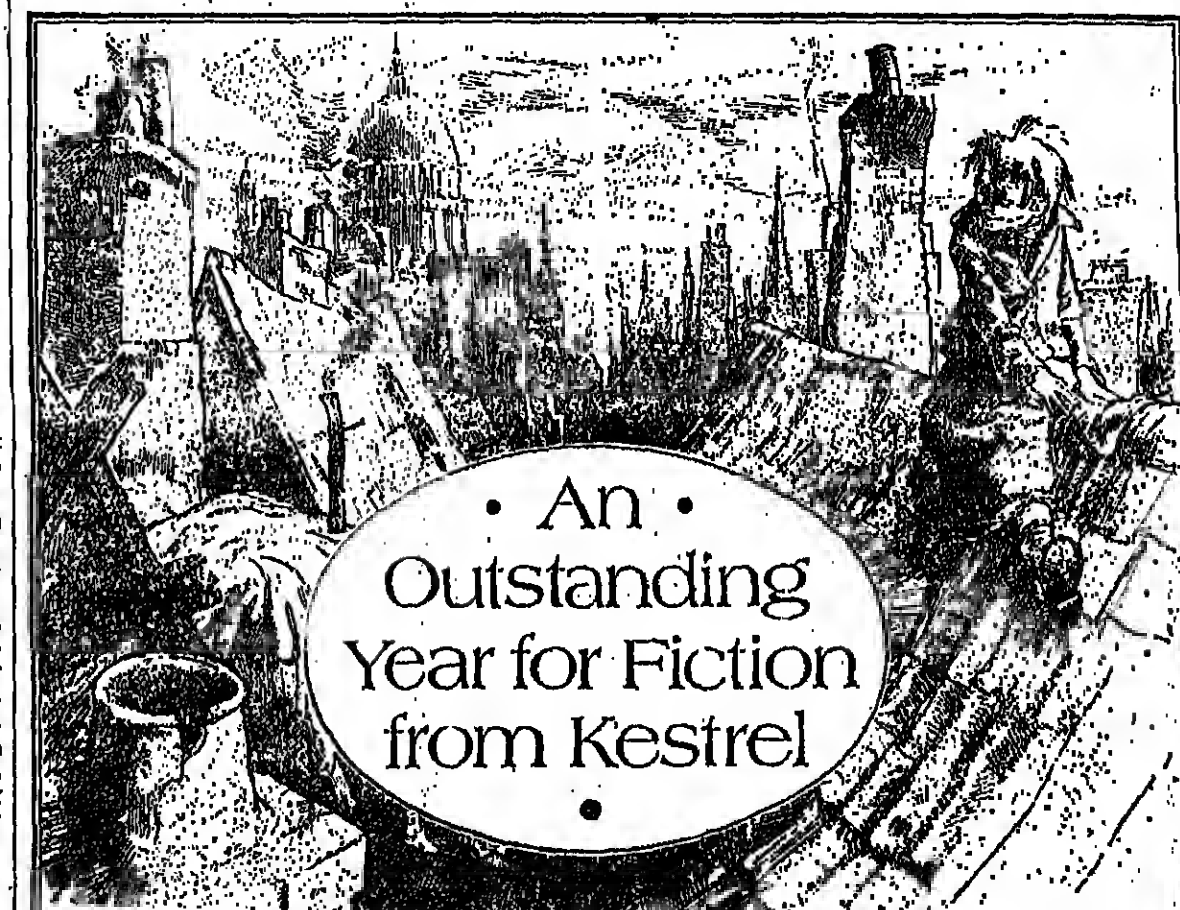
0 7011 2534 9

The first thing to be said about George Mackay Brown's *Six Lives of Fankle the Cat* is that it suggests itself admirably as a serial-story fan reading aloud. It must also be said that, despite the witty and nicely complementary illustrations by Ian MacInnes, it rests on the page a little more uneasily. Mr Brown's relaxed manner and somewhat loosely constructed narrative look the cutting edge, the dramatic tension, the hint of other worlds behind the words, that we have grown to expect from his brilliant creation and re-creation of Orcadian myth and legend, for children and adults.

It is as though when faced with an audience perhaps younger than that of his earlier children's tales his nerve has occasionally failed him. Fankle is a "midnight-faced", talking cat, rescued from death by stone and water by little Jenny Thomson, a timid girl, who wouldn't say a cross word to a horse-fly that had stung her. Mr Brown's story is of

Fankle's various existences: in pirate-haunted Liverpool, Ancient Egypt, China, on the moon, and in Orkney itself. The quality of the stories is uneven. In some, such as the mysterious "Roses and Moonlight", in which Fankle disappears and we meet the darkly prophetic cat-loving Mac Scaid ("There's a cat-eat person in this island that makes cat soup"), he soars to the top of his form. Others, notably the tale of the cherry-cake-addicted kirk minister, are curiously uninvolved. But throughout the book, tempering considerably its generally over-sweet tone, the sharp eye of the poet and a corresponding deftness of observation and phrase are constantly displayed. On a day of snow, Sammie the schoolboy's mouth is a "rod smoking O". Jenny's hypochondriac mother, suddenly deprived of a day's outing over the sea to Hoy, looks like "one of the hanging gardens of Babylon in her summer dress".

Few contemporary poets have written more rewardingly both for adults and children than Mackay Brown. So far, so good at the barrel; he has handed out the undiluted malt. With Fankle comes the addition of a little water. The result is by no means unpleasant, but one feels that he might have trusted the strong heads and hearts of his younger readers a little more.



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